

William H. Gerstenmaier, Associate Administrator, Human Exploration and Operations



William H. Gerstenmaier is the associate administrator for the Human Exploration and Operations Mission Directorate at NASA Headquarters in Washington. In this position, Gerstenmaier provides strategic direction for all aspects of NASA's human exploration of space and cross-agency space support functions of space communications and space launch vehicles. He provides programmatic direction for the operation and utilization of the International Space Station and its crew; development of the Gateway, Space Launch System and Orion spacecraft; and is providing strategic guidance and direction for the commercial crew and cargo programs. Working with commercial and international partners, NASA will lead a sustainable return to the surface of the Moon.

Gerstenmaier began his NASA career in 1977 at the then Lewis Research Center in Cleveland, performing aeronautical research. He was involved with the wind tunnel tests that were used to develop the calibration curves for the air data probes used during entry on the Space Shuttle.

Beginning in 1988, Gerstenmaier headed the Orbital Maneuvering Vehicle (OMV) Operations Office, Systems Division at the Johnson Space Center. He was responsible for all aspects of OMV operations at Johnson, including development of a ground control center and training facility for OMV, operations support to vehicle development, and personnel and procedures development to support OMV operations. Subsequently he headed the Space Shuttle/Space Station Freedom Assembly Operations Office, Operations Division. He was responsible for resolving technical assembly issues and developing assembly strategies.

Gerstenmaier also served as Shuttle/Mir Program operations manager. In this role, he was the primary interface to the Russian Space Agency for operational issues, negotiating all protocols used in support of operations during the Shuttle/Mir missions. In addition, he supported NASA 2 operations in Russia, from January through September 1996 including responsibility for daily activities, as well as the health and safety of the NASA crewmember on space station Mir. He scheduled science activities, public affairs activities, monitored Mir systems, and communicated with the NASA astronaut on Mir.

In 1998, Gerstenmaier was named manager, Space Shuttle Program Integration, responsible for the overall management, integration, and operations of the Space Shuttle Program. This included development and operations of all Space Shuttle elements, including the orbiter, external tank, solid rocket boosters, and Space Shuttle main engines, as well as the facilities required to support ground processing and flight operations.

In December 2000, Gerstenmaier was named deputy manager, ISS Program, and two years later became manager. He was responsible for the day-to-day management, development, integration, and operation of the space station. This included the design, manufacturing, testing, and delivery of complex space flight hardware and software, and for its integration with the elements from international partners into a fully functional and operating space station.

Named associate administrator for the Space Operations Directorate in 2005, Gerstenmaier directed the safe completion of the last 21 Space Shuttle missions that witnessed assembly completion of the International Space Station. During this time, he provided programmatic direction for the integration and operation of the ISS, space communications, and space launch vehicles.

Gerstenmaier received a Bachelor of Science in aeronautical engineering from Purdue University in 1977 and a Master of Science degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Toledo in 1981. He completed course work early in his career for a doctorate in dynamics and control with emphasis in propulsion at Purdue University, and in spring 2019, he will receive an honorary doctorate from his alma mater.

For his technical contributions and leadership in national and international human spaceflight programs, Gerstenmaier was elected into the 2018 class of the National Academy of Engineering.

Gerstenmaier is the recipient of numerous awards, including three NASA Certificates of Commendation, two NASA Exceptional Service Medals, a Senior NASA Outstanding Leadership Medal, the Meritorious Executive Presidential Rank Award, and Distinguish Executive Presidential Rank Award. He also was honored with an Outstanding Aerospace Engineer Award from Purdue University. Additionally, he was twice honored by Aviation Week and Space Technology for outstanding achievement in the field of space. His other awards include: the AIAA International Cooperation Award; the National Space Club Astronautics Engineer Award; National Space Club Von Braun Award; the Federation of Galaxy Explorers Space Leadership Award; AIAA International Award; the AIAA Fellow; Purdue University Distinguished Alumni Award; and honored at Purdue as an Old Master in the Old Masters Program; recipient of the Rotary National Award for Space Achievement's National Space Trophy; Space Transportation Leadership Award; the AIAA von Braun Award for Excellence in Space Program Management; and the AIAA von Karman Lectureship in Astronautics.

He is married to the former Marsha Ann Johnson. They have two children.

February 2019

Last Updated: Feb. 19, 2019

Editor: NASA Content Administrator